



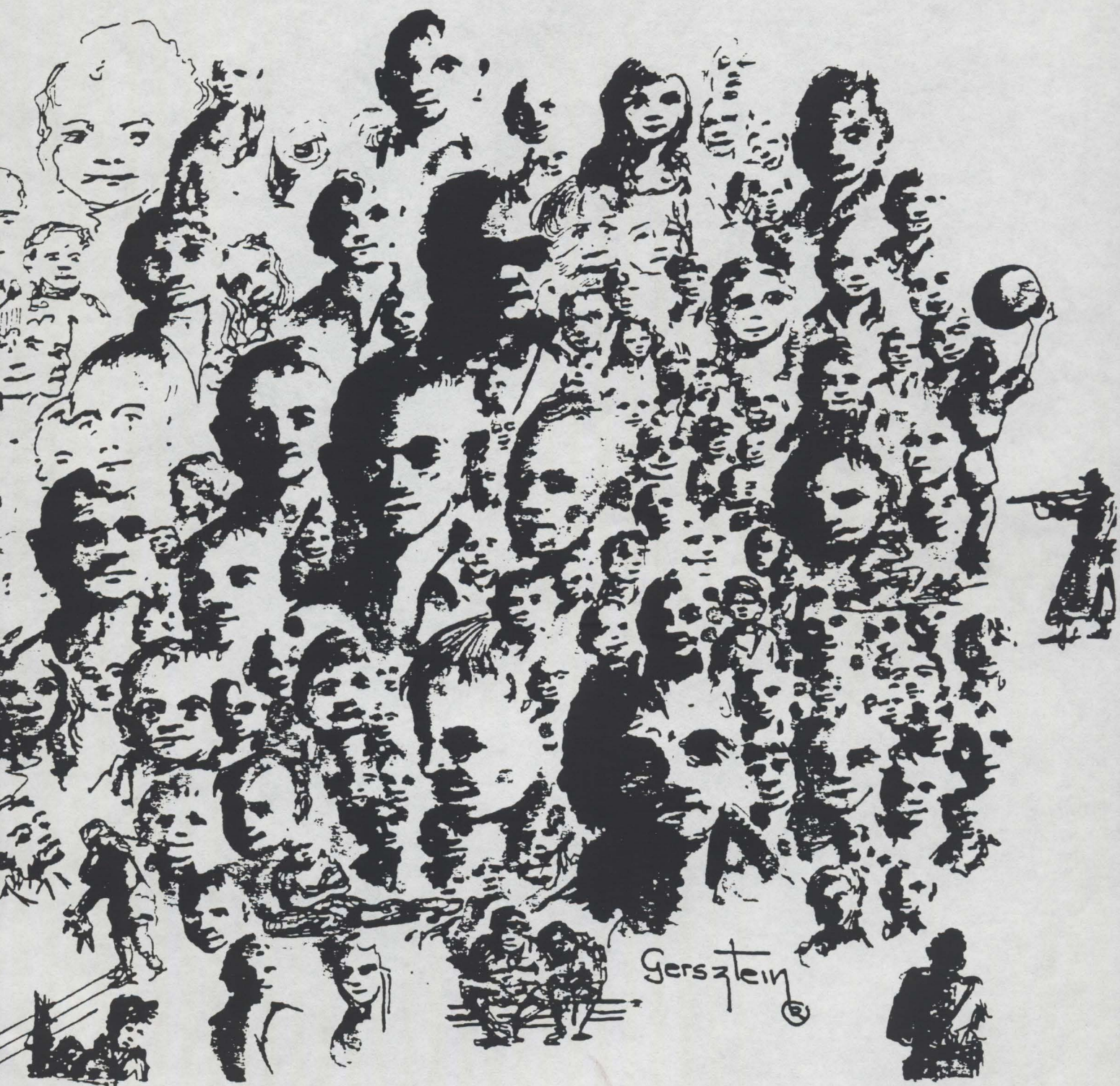
## **Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection**

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Even in the darkest of pits  
There is hope of coming out  
into the light

William Z. Good, M.D.

West Covina, California

December 2000

FROM "JERUSHALAYIM D'LITA" AND BACK

(Wilno, "Jerusalem of Lithuania" )

by William Z. Good, M.D., F.A.A.F.P.

(VOVA GDUD)

With acknowledgement to Pearl, my beloved wife  
and best friend whose enthusiasm and initiative  
inspired my narrative recorded by her here.



אין קולות אלה  
יש תקווה  
לעלות מן הבור  
אל האור  
2168 7328 277  
פ'35 י'פ'35



From Our House To Yours

Peace, Good Health and  
Happiness In Your Home

Dr. and Mrs. William Z. Good  
and Family







With my parents and my puppy Bootz.



I must have been unhappy about the arrival of the new competition.





## GDUD FAMILY CHRONICLE

My father, Dov Ber Gdud was the oldest son of Chone Velvl Gdud, a lumber trader in the village named Grois Dorf near Duksht.

A very strong man, Chone Velvl was amused when three peasants had trouble with lifting a cart stuck in the mud - Chone Velvl did it singlehandedly but sustained a hernia which got incarcerated - he died of peritonitis at the age of 36 after a grueling trip to Warsaw for medical help.

He left a pregnant wife, Rachel Leah, (uncle Mula, now living in Argentina was born months later) with seven children. She tried to make a living by cooking hot meals and selling them to the passengers of the trains at the railroad station.

My father - Dov Ber, the eldest, set out to a distant Yeshiva in Mir at the age of 12.

He was permitted to sleep in the unheated attic of the synagogue and "ate days" - was fed each day in turn by another Jewish family.

After about ten years he was ordained as an orthodox rabbi by the famous scholar and rabbi Chofetz Chaim himself - a great honor. My father, though an ordained rabbi did not believe that one should make a living by being a rabbi because historically the great Jewish scholars and sages the Tanaim, the Amoraim - the writers of the Talmud, the Mishnah and of the Gemorah were great rabbis but they made a living by being tailors, shoemakers, carpenters and so on - not by being the appointed person in charge of a congregation as it is customary in the United States and was in Europe before the war. Incidentally the Gaon of Wilno had never accepted the post of a rabbi because he wanted to







dedicate his life to study and research - he was also a great mathematician and did a lot of research in that field so he never accepted the formal position of a rabbi in charge of a congregation.

The Jewish community of Minsk customarily tried to marry the young rabbis off immediately but none of the girls my father was introduced to were acceptable to him - until my future mother, Chana Kopelowicz was presented to him. He knew then that this was it!

My mother came from a totally different background. Her father, Itzhak Zusman Kopelowicz, "Itche", a strong chassidic turpentine manufacturer from the village of Rebzhevich near Minsk had once disarmed a Cossack who had come to rob them at gunpoint and kicked him out of the house through two sets of closed doors. The Cossack then sent his friends to my grandfather begging for the return of his rifle - he dared not return to his regiment without it.

My mother was very much ahead of her times. Her Chassidic family thought that girls need not be educated. But that was not what Chana believed - she left home and went to Minsk. As a Jewess she couldn't go to a Russian high school, so she studied as an extern - that means that she had a tutor and at the end of each school-year she would sit in at the exams and thus was passing from year to year. She worked herself through a highschool diploma while working as a seamstress. My mother had a beautiful voice, was musically talented and wrote poetry.

When the newlyweds came to live with the bride's parents at the turpentine factory in Triles near Stolpce it was Chana rather than the young rabbi who could help with the running of the factory, knew Biel-orussian and could manage the workers. But my father was learning fast







- he was in charge by the time we moved to Niemenczyn.

I was born in Stolpce and came to live in Niemenczyn near Wilno at the age of two. When I was in Israel with the International Medical Congress in 1968 and visited the president Shazar's residence as one of the physicians invited, Shazar greeted everybody individually in English. When I responded in Hebrew he asked me where I was from and when I said Los Angeles, he asked:

- Did you learn Hebrew in L.A?

- No, actually I learned it in Wilno.

- Oh, so you are a native of Wilno?

- Well technically no - I was actually born in a small town not far from Wilno.

- What town?

- Oh, I 'm sure you've never heard about the place.

- Just tell me.

- Stolpce.

- Stolpce! That is where I was born too.

Shazar started to embrace me and everybody took pictures.

- Do you know who delivered you?

- Yes, Doctor Greenberg.

That is the doctor who had delivered me too! I have lots of pictures with president Shazar.

We lived in a small resort town 20 kilometers outside of Wilno called Niemenczyn. It was a town of 2000 inhabitants out of which 700 were Jews. We had a Tarbut Hebrew elementary school to which I went for 6 years. Everything was taught in Hebrew - math, history, geography. We studied Polish and other languages.







My very first language after I was born was Russian with my mother and Yiddish with my father. At the age of three I stopped talking Russian and switched to Polish - the language of the country and Yiddish. At the age of six I switched from Yiddish to Hebrew - my father wanted me to learn Hebrew.

My father was the owner of a turpentine factory in Niemenczyn which also produced pitch and charcoal. By the time I remember them my mother was a homemaker. She was very charitable - not a nurse but like a true nurse she would find the sick and the poor in the town of Niemenczyn and would always aid them, bring them food and medications, give them enemas and things like that - she was a very beloved lady. My Father by then was very athletic, of good physical abilities. He was riding horses, was a good marksman and competed in all sorts of athletic pursuits with the goyim ( the gentile workers). They looked up to him because of that. He was a very generous and kind man - this was actually a key factor that later saved our lives. The workers were gentiles, mostly Bielorussians and some Poles. We lived near to the factory which was about 1.5 miles outside of Niemenczyn. I grew up amidst very beautiful surroundings. There were only three houses near the factory amidst a huge pine forest.

I was a very happy child. My family consisted of my father, my mother and my younger brother who was a violinist - a real virtuoso, he was a soloist with the Wilno city orchestra at the age of fourteen. He was very poor in school - always three classes behind. He was blind in one eye - my parents did not catch on to it until he went to school. He was extremely talented and extremely set on music - nothing else mattered. My father was very respected and liked by the people who worked









My little brother Motl and I around home near Niemenczyn circa 1934.





for him. They were poor, drunkards and would always come to him to ask for an advance. He would always give people money - they invariably would return it but he was very generous and kind to them - this was very important later, as I tell my story it will be clear how important it was.

The part of the Jewish population of our community that we associated with was very Zionist, although there were also Yiddishists - socialist Jews who did not believe in the Zionist movement - they were called the "Bund".

Up to the age of twelve I lived in my village and my only friends were the children of the Gentile workers and a son of a forester who was a Bieloruss. The Bielorussian language is a Slavic one different from both Russian and Polish - an in-between language but it also has a literature.

Pearl comes from a totally different background - her father was a Jewish intellectual who had studied law in Petersburg (now Leningrad) and graduated from the university of Berlin in political economy. Her family was not religious and assimilated - the language spoken in her home was Russian. When she went to a Polish language Jewish Montessori school with children of other well-to-do, assimilated Jewish intellectuals she switched to Polish. Then, during the Nazi occupation in the ghetto she was handicapped because she did not know Yiddish; even after learning it she was laughed at because of her accent - she spoke like a "shiksa". So now even though she could speak Yiddish she is reluctant to.

We did not know each other - we met in Italy after the war. After we







married our two fathers were fond of and respected each other as honorable men, but privately each regarded the other an ignoramus. Rabbi Gdud had very little interest in Western history and culture and Samuel Esterowicz, the university graduate, had only a couple years of "cheder" and had never studied the vast Talmudic literature.

The country we lived in was highly antisemitic. There were 3 1/2 million Jews in Poland in a population of about 32 million - 10% of the population of Poland was Jewish. 3 1/2 million Polish Jews perished during the war. It would have been absolutely impossible for the Germans or anybody else to exterminate that many Jews if the Polish population were not cooperative and had not welcomed the destruction of the Jews.

Generally speaking the Poles were extremely antisemitic even though it was not the official government policy. There were restrictions for the Jews, however- for instance Jews could not be landowners. Jews were also restricted in the professions. There was a "numerus clausus" - that meant that only 1% - 1/2% could enroll in Polish universities. That was why so many Jews went to study in France, Belgium and Italy.

To describe how bad it was to be a Jewish student at a Polish university I'll tell you the story of a veterinary student I met in Italy after the war when I was studying medicine. Edmund Bass was a Polish Jew considerably older than I was. I was studying anatomy very hard and knew it quite well. When we studied the nervous system Edmund knew it as well as I did, who was studying it currently - even though he had studied it 10 years ago. I asked him Edmund, how can you know it so well after so many years? He answered :

"Listen, when you study with the antisemitic professor X as a Jew you







have to know it forever. Why? You don't understand what the life of a Jewish veterinary student in Poland was like. There were only two Jewish students enrolled at the veterinary school and we had a ghetto in the department - that means that we could not come in and take a seat with everybody else - there was a separate yellow marked place on the left side for the Jews - like Negroes used to in the south here. So there were two students who had to sit on the left side of the hall. At the end of every lecture we had to descend a staircase leading from the hall. The Polish students would line up on each side of the staircase immediately after a lecture would end and we had to go down the stairs which meant being kicked in your ass and punched in your belly all the way from up to down.

It was the daily curriculum of a Jewish student at a Polish university.

The only way you could pass the course (the professor was very antisemitic too) was to know everything, but everything so that there was no way for him to catch you. You could wake me up out of sound sleep and ask me anything and I would spout it like a machine-gun!"

That tells you what it was like. The population was very antisemitic, particularly in the years prior to World War II. The worst were the Endeks, the student body of the Polish fascists - they were extreme Jew haters.

Again, officially Poland was a republic with no laws against the Jews. The seating on the left side was not an official rule but something imposed by the students - the Endeks coerced the other students - they had a lot of political clout.

Even in Niemenczyn in elementary school there was the Tarbut He-







brew school, the Polish public school and the town jail in between. During intermission there was always a barrage of rocks being thrown from their playground to ours. Every time we would leave school they would be waiting. We would go in groups and in this case it was more of an even fight- it was a small town in which 700 out of a population of 2000 were Jews and the Jewish kids were very athletic, so we had small scale gangfights (like they have in California) between the Poles and the Jews. We were very able-bodied. At night it was for real - not with guns but with sticks, stones, sometimes knives. But the Jewish kids were very swift - they were the sons of butchers, tailors, coachmen. We were perfectly capable to hold our own.

I must have been about eight or nine when at one time a gang of teenage goyim would wait for us at the end of the school-day and would beat us up. Many of the little kids had been hurt. One day, our teacher Boris Edelman grabbed a fence-pole and single-handedly went after the gang of these big hooligans. I remember that joyous scene of them running away and him pursuing them, trying not to miss anyone from the attention of his stick. He was a member of the "Betar", (a militant faction of Zionism), aged about twenty. I was very impressed with his act - he looked so tall to me. He left for Palestine at the end of the school-year.

During my visit to Israel in 1971 I spent a couple of days on the phone to locate him. It was difficult since, as I later discovered, he had changed his name to Hebrew - Adin is the counterpart of the German name Edelman.

The funny thing is that he is not tall, just slightly taller than myself now and he does not remember that episode which impressed me so









On my horse "Czarniuk" ("Blackie") near home circa 1934.



My family in 1939.





much.

All these fights were going on between the Poles, the Bielorussians and the Jews but my personal friends were the three Polish kids who lived next to me. We played soccer and went ice-scating together, doing all the sports - riding horses, swimming in the river, going in kayaks - we were real friends - that was a personal thing, nothing to do with the general situation.

In 1936 when I was twelve I graduated from the elementary school and had to go to high school. We moved to Wilno which was 20 km away and I was enrolled in the Hebrew high school Tarbut. The antisemitism was just as virulent in Wilno. When I would go through the Green Bridge on my way home from school with the Jewish kids (we were younger and smaller) we were always jumped there by big Polish football-players who would line up, grab our hats and throw them into the river, push us down and beat us up.

Wilno is a city famous in Jewish history. It was the cradle of Jewish learning, the place where the Gaon of Wilno (the Genius of Wilno) came from. The Gaon lived about 200 years ago. His real name was Eliyahu ben Solomon; he was a Misnagdi - vehemently opposed to the Chasidic movement (the disciples of Bal Shem Tov) and he had actually excommunicated them.

There were about 80,000 Jews in Wilno before the second World War out of a population of about 200-220 thousand of other nationalities - mostly Poles, some Bielorussians and Russians.

It was called the "Jerusalem of Lithuania" because we had an incredible bastion of Jewish learning in our city. There were Yeshivas and







high schools with Hebrew as their teaching language, there was also the I.W.O. - Jewish Research Institute. Wilno was a very important Jewish cultural center.

When Pearl and I were born the city was under Polish rule. It was historically the capital of Lithuania and was awarded to it after World War I but in 1919 a Polish general took it away from Lithuania. There was a big fight and constant animosity, because of this Lithuania had no diplomatic relations with Poland between the two Wars.

In 1939 the Germans marched on Poland on September 1st and Poland was split between Germany and Russia. There were lots of Jewish refugees from the German occupied West Poland to East Poland occupied by the Russians. After about two weeks the Russians handed Wilno over to the Lithuanians. Wilno became the capital of the Lithuanian democratic republic under president Smetona.

At this point we had to study Lithuanian, a very difficult language totally unrelated to anything we knew, derived from the Sanscrit - a difficult language with a difficult grammar. But we, the spirited students of the Tarbut High school were proud to be able to master anything - in a year's time we made incredible progress - I was able to read, write and converse in Lithuanian.

At the end of June of 1940 Mother Russia decided to stop playing games: they declared a plebiscite (so called public voting) and the republic of Lithuania annexed itself to the Soviet Union in an "unanimous vote" - with some encouragement from the Red Army - and became a Soviet republic along with the other Baltic countries Latvia and Estonia.







What it did to me was that suddenly I had to study Russian - it was a language that I had known at the age of one, two and three but had since forgotten. Not only did I have to study Russian, but Hebrew was abolished since it was representative of Zionism which was banned in the Soviet Union. Therefore our dearly beloved Hebrew high school Tarbut had to switch to Yiddish. Incidentally, Tarbut was a very well known institution all over the world.

In Israel they would never know that I was not a native but said that my Hebrew was too literary. When I was in Israel in 1985 the taxi driver said:

- You're not from Jerusalem.

- How do you know?

- I can tell when somebody is from Jerusalem. Are you from Haifa? When I told him where I was from he almost flipped out.

The Israelis know that if you are a graduate of the Tarbut Hebrew high school of Wilno you know Hebrew better than the average Israeli high school graduate.

So now we were forbidden to study Hebrew - we were to study Russian, Lithuanian and instead of Hebrew we had an option - we either took Yiddish or Polish.

At that point a large group of Tarbut students decided to leave the institution because we decided to go for Yiddish but we felt we could not do it in the halls of our Hebrew School. We were very fanatic about it - we talked only Hebrew among ourselves. Anybody heard talking Yiddish had fingers pointing at him - hey, he is talking Yiddish, not Hebrew, that was a no-no. At that time Yiddish represented to us the language of the "Bund", the anti-Zionists, the Jewish Socialists and we did not want it propagated in our institution.







A lot of the Tarbut students who did not feel as strongly about it stayed on in Tarbut which became a Yiddish school. But we did and therefore we transferred to Epsteins, a Jewish high school which before the war had Polish as the teaching language - everything was taught in Polish except for the Jewish subjects. Now Epstein became a Yiddish school. Yiddish I knew - it was a language I spoke at home. In transferring I skipped a grade - that was very good, incidentally, because I graduated at seventeen before the Germans came - this changed my life in later years - it had an incredible impact on my life.

My High School Diploma, which I carried in the heel of my boot through the years of the Nazi occupation enabled me to enroll to Medical School in Italy in 1945.

So now we studied Yiddish, Russian and Lithuanian. We also studied Latin, of course and a foreign language - we could choose German, French or English. As Zionists we chose English.

I was now under Soviet indoctrination being fed communist doctrine, Marxism, Leninism and all the geopolitical studies - communist views of the history of Russia and of everything else.

Each time the government of the country changes you are subjected not only to a change of language but also you are brainwashed in a different direction. However we were so indoctrinated in Zionism and in Hebrew that we scorned the communist propaganda - of course with reinforcement from home. I graduated from high school in June 1941.

There was a general political purge going on in the city - that meant that the Soviets were deporting the Zionists, the affluent and other "undesirable elements". Our family was on their deportation list







- my father was a wealthy man. We were hiding for about a week to escape the Russian deportation. My father's uncle was the chief of a Yeshiva in Mir, a renowned learning institution - he was one of the Rosh Yeshivah. When Mir was occupied by the Russians he ran away to Wilno which was Lithuanian then and lived in our house with his family. The Russians caught up with him and he alone was deported in June of 1941. Our family had escaped the Russian deportation. Unfortunately so did the uncle's family - they did not survive the Nazi occupation whereas the uncle came back from Siberia after the war. We did not sleep at home during the deportations, we were watching if the Soviet police was after us. We knew we were on the list as Zionist, proud Jews and affluent people - we were targets. However apparently we had escaped the purge for the time being. The purge was over, they had one week for it and it was finished. We knew about that because I had a friend by the name of Voronin whose father was a tailor. In his house lodged a secret police N.K.W.D. official, a Russian Jew.

On June 22, 1941 I went with some friends (two boys and two girls) for an outing in kayaks on the river Wilja. We were meeting at the Voronin place. It was early in the morning. There was talk on the radio that the Germans had crossed the frontier and the war had started. We came to the Voronins and decided to ask the N.K.W.D. guy. We woke him up and told him the news. He put on radio Minsk and there was music and sporting events. He said nonsense! We are going to purge a little more - it will be a big day today. We were kids and he was the big secret police guy. When he said there was nothing wrong we went on our bikes to the river to our kayaks and away we rowed against the stream.







At around ten o'clock in the morning there were planes all over the sky - we look around and wonder - what is happening? Then we say, those are probably military exercises. But then we see bombing - some say lets run home but I said you're crazy - run back to the bombing? We are fine here. So we stayed on the river all day, at night we came back home finding bomb damage (Pearl's uncle Nochem Gerstein had been killed) and the Russians retreating.

The worst thing that scared me about the tales of German atrocities was that they would castrate Jewish kids - here I was still a virgin! I was seventeen

Oh my God that was terrible, terrible, I was not going to let them, I was going to run away from the Germans. I got together with another kid, we were good cyclists - we would run away. We had a family council. My mother and father decided that they would stay but they realized the gravity of the situation and if I was young, courageous and willing to run they gave me their blessings. They made packs for us, mainly clothes and things you need going into Russia even though it was summer and gave us money. The night was terrible, there was lots of bombing. Monday we left heading East to Minsk into Bielorussia. The Soviet troops were retreating and the Lithuanians were shooting at their Soviet comrades. The Germans were bombing and machine-gunning the refugees - the casualties were incredible. As we were riding my friend was killed by the German machine-gun fire. The planes would go down low, the people would fall down and not move. They were just spraying - either you were hit or not. There were thousands and thousands of refugees kids, cattle, women, all kinds of people - some of them got hit and killed, some not. I was one of those who survived and







got to Minsk. But the German tactic (the Blitzkrieg) was not to go toward their objective directly but rather break through behind it. They were already East of Minsk and had all the Russian troops and the refugees surrounded and locked in - the Germans were already marching East. So that when I came to Minsk there were lots of Soviet troops but they were locked in. Two of my uncles, directors of factories in Minsk were the victims of Stalin's purges in 1937.

There was nothing for me to do in Minsk - I couldn't go ahead so I started to go back to Wilno. On the way the peasants robbed me, took away my bike, took away my belongings - left me barefoot with just my pants. It took me more than a week to get back home to Wilno. All my way back was under German occupation - that was what had emboldened the peasants to rob me - the Poles and the Bielorussians could recognize a Jew two miles away - they would say: you see this figure far off, is this a person or a Jew? The Germans had occupied Wilno the day after I left.

A few days after my coming back home I was going to the barber's. I had to wear a "J" and walk in the gutter - these were the rules the Germans had already imposed on the Jews. I was going to the barber's on Bakshta street when I saw a German jeep driving toward me, so I accelerated and stepped into the barber shop. I took off my "J" because I thought he might have seen me. One minute later he was there shouting du! du! du! (you! you!) They took me on the jeep, then they picked up a few other young Jews and took us to the Bernardynka public park and told us that we would be taken to Molodeczno, a town in Bielorussia, to clean up the ruins of the bombardment. There were about 500 people in that park overnight. I could have walked away, we were not







really guarded, we were just planted there waiting to go to Molodeczno in the morning. Instead in the morning we were taken on trucks to Ponary, a place about 15 miles outside of Wilno, unknown at that time - now it is infamous because 100,000 people had been killed and buried there out of which 80,000 were Jews. There are only two known survivors who got out of Ponary alive, and I am one of them.

When we came to Ponary there was a huge mass grave excavated, ready for us. There were two machine-guns standing in front of the truck. The first thing they told us was we couldn't talk, scream or move - if there was any commotion coming out of the truck the two machine-guns would go off.

They took us one at a time from the truck to the grave, shooting each one in the back of the head. I was standing on the truck looking at it - nobody said a word, nobody moved. When my turn came I went off the truck towards the grave like everybody else and just a few feet before the grave I fell. At the same time, synchronous with my falling, the Lithuanian executioner shot me with his handgun. I happened to fall not as a consequence of his shooting - I just fell and he fired in the same second and he believed that he got me and that was why I fell. There was no scratch on me but he did not question this. The next victim they killed just about where I was fell on top of me and soaked me with his blood. They brought all the trucks, took off everybody (maybe 30 people to each truck) and killed all the people from the Bernardynka park. After everything was finished the machine guns sprayed the bodies in the grave and around the grave because not everybody was quite dead, a lot of people were still moaning. There was a lot of shooting for several minutes. I don't know what happened







to me at that time, but I have no exact recollection of when the shooting stopped - I have a blank, I may have passed out.

When I opened my eyes, saw nothing, moved my head and saw nobody around I got up and started to walk towards the gate where I came from because the place was fenced by barbed wire. There were two guards at the gate who saw me and one of them took a shot at me but it was a hilly terrain so I dropped down and he did not hit me. I ran back to the grave which was next to the barbed wire. That was the most horrible moment of my life - here I was, young and healthy but terrified because I couldn't get out. It was daytime and if I would try to climb over the barbed wire the guard would probably see me from far away and shoot me. My only chance of getting out was to dig under the barbed wire. I dug with my bare hands, scared that if I was not fast enough they would catch me. That was the most terrible, the worst moment of my life. I don't know how long it took me but I squeezed through and ran away.

I was all bloody and in tatters from the barbed wire. On the road I stumbled into the hut of a Polish peasant I did not know and told them my story and they were kind to me. I washed up, they gave me some clothes and I went home.

None of the Jews who lived in our apartment building believed me when I told my story - they said I was crazy, I must have had a nervous break-down after having my friend killed on the way to Minsk. My father believed my story and he said: - they are out to kill us all - we are not going to the ghetto (there was talk about that), we are not going to let them lock us up, we are getting out! We packed up, we took some money with us and my father hid some money and Swiss







watches in the attic of the house we lived in - this turned out an important factor later.

We left the city and went to live in our home in Niemenczyn, where the factory was. That was in July and we had 2 months of pleasant living before the horror caught up with us. It was summer, in our own home, in beautiful natural surroundings. The Germans did not bother us but they planted four Lithuanians in our house. The factory was to carry on but my father could not be in charge of it because he was a Jew so they put in a twenty four year old Lithuanian director named Stepanas (Steven) Nera. He had three young assistants with him aged about 18 - 20. He knew nothing about the operation of the factory but he was nominally in charge. He had to depend on my father to arrange everything. He also had another problem - he spoke only Lithuanian, no Russian, Bielorrussian or Polish so I was his only translator - nobody spoke Lithuanian so he could communicate only through me. They lived with us in our house for over two months and we became friendly. We were constantly wrestling. I was seventeen, Steven was 24. At that time I was very fit and strong and I would always get him down. We were lifting weights and I was always beating everybody else - it was also determination, I guess. We were doing all kinds of athletic pursuits together, we would go to the river where I had a kayak, he would go in the kayak with me. My brother played the violin, he would play all kinds of folk-music, we would dance - we were buddies. Periodically he would tell me: Vovka, all Jews are kaputt and I would say: don't talk like that, Steven and he would say: sorry, I didn't mean it.

On the night of Friday, September 20th, 1941 we were asleep when suddenly the dog started barking - he was on a leash on a wire running







across the property and he was furious, barking madly. My father got up, opened the window and saw the figure of a woman. He asked: who is it? She whispered - Josefowa (in Polish it means Joseph's wife) listen, she whispers, knowing that the Lithuanians are in the house - our husbands have been mobilized to dig graves for the Jews of Niemenczyn. They will all be killed at dawn, get out of the house immediately. Did you hear me? - yes. Did you understand? Yes, thank you! We were all four out of the house. My father had prepared a hiding place in the huge pile of stumps - maybe 300 - 500 yards across in the middle of the factory yard. In the midst of it there was a place where you could enter a big hiding place in which four people could sit or lay down. There was bread, water and blankets. At first my father intended for all of us to go in there - but the workers knew about this hiding place. They had a lot of our belongings we had entrusted to them to keep for us - good clothes, fur, leather - a lot of things. So my father said - we can't all four go in there. If anyone would get greedy and should want to inherit our stuff, if he denounces us and gets rid of all four of us in one shot - no consequences. But if he will know that two of us are still free he would be afraid that we could come and take revenge. So my father told my mother and brother to go up in there - he and I went and slept in the forest. The houses - our house and the factory were situated in a field surrounded by a huge pine forest, a big stretch of land. At dawn my father said why don't you go to Gasperowicz, another worker with whom my father had made arrangements that he would shelter us if the time came and we needed it. I'll go and look around our house and if everything is quiet I'll dig out the handguns we had hidden.







At this point several things happened to myself, my Mother and my Father.

First, what happened to me: I was going to Gasperowicz, it was about 2 km. away from us. I walked out of the huge forest, came to a field and here from the other end of the field walks out Steven, (the Lithuanian) with a rifle on his shoulder - I saw him and instinctively ran back into the forest - but he had seen me too and I felt embarrassed to run away from him. He had seen me so if I went back to the forest now, and I could, I was quite distant - that would mean that I did not trust him - but we are buddies, I can't do that! So I marched right out and said "Steve, where are you going so early in the morning with a rifle?" He answered "Just hunting". I saw that he had a handgun sticking out and did not quite know what to think. He acted very normal, he asked me "Where are you going?" I said my father sent me to Gasperowicz to hire him to transport some turperntine to the city. Well, he says lets go together. So we go on with some small talk and we come to Gasperowicz. He says,

"Why don't you wait a minute here and I'll go in and talk to him". O.K. I wait and wonder - how is he going to talk to him? Just about two minutes later he comes out with his rifle pointed at me and says "Get in!"

I say "Steve, we are friends!"

"Get in or I'll murder you right here"

I say "Steve, I can't believe it, we are friends!"

"Get in!!"

I saw he meant business so I went in and he locked me into the barn, closing a huge door and putting a bar across the door. He told the son







of Gasperowicz, Vincent half in broken Russian, half in Lithuanian :

"If Vovka out, you kaput!"

Vince was my friend, about my age, a couple of years older than I.

When I said

"Vince, let me out!" he answered,

"You heard what he told me, if I let you out, it will come to me what was coming to you". It was pitch dark inside so I asked,

"Is there a way that I could get out through the roof?"

He said no. I asked, "How can I get out?"

"Just knock down the door".

"How?"

" Just give it a good knock."

Stupidly I didn't wait and immediately gave a good knock but the door didn't budge, so I went to the opposite wall, ran and threw myself at the door, the door broke and I got out. If I had only waited 5 minutes Steven would have been gone to mobilize the peasants but he heard the first knock so he came back and here he was standing pointing his rifle at me.

There was a furiously barking dog running on a leash between us. A neighbour was calling to me in Polish:

"Vovka, throw yourself at him, kill him!"

I looked at him and thought: I can kill him, sure I can kill him but how do I get to him - he has a rifle and a I also knew that he had a handgun. In a split second I knew I couldn't get to him, he could kill me before, so I just dodged the dog and ran ( he did not come to the dog). I ran behind the barn and into the field away from the village. I threw off my sheepskin in order to run faster and just gave a glance back and saw Steven leaning the rifle on the fence and aiming - the







very same moment that I threw myself down he fired. Immediately after the shot I was back on my feet and ran, ran, ran, zigzagging - I threw myself down just as a shot was fired. The moment I swerve or fall a shot goes off and this went on for seven times. I tried to pull off my high boots to run faster but it was too time consuming - that was lucky for me because these were my boots for the next three years. Probably seven shots were fired, I ran through and into the forest - out of his sight and in the forest I was still running until I was totally exhausted and totally breathless, then I fell and just cried and cried and cried. When I got up I thought: now what? I remembered that there was a farm where twenty Niemenczyn Jews were working. I bet that they are going to come for them! This was about 5-7 miles away from where I was. I ran to that place - I ran, ran, ran again, saw two Poles and asked:

Are the Jews here?"

"No, they took them all away, except for one, he is asleep on the hay".

"Where?"

"Over there". So I ran and woke him up by shaking him.

I said "Come, run, run!"

"What happened?"

I said "Come, run with me, I'll tell you later."

He got up - he did not know that they had taken all the others away and left him there asleep on the hay. Later we found out that they came back for him later - they realized that they had missed one. He was saved by my running there. His name is Avreml Deich and he lives now in Brooklyn. We ran away.







Now I have to go back to tell you what happened to my father. My father went to our home, he thought that everything looked quiet. When he approached the place where his weapons were hidden he was jumped by a Lithuanian policeman who lay in wait for him with a rifle. They were one on one, my father was a very strong, athletic man, he tried to get to the policeman but there was no way. He would shout:

"Don't move!" He had his gun cocked.

"Take one step and I'll kill you!"

My father tried to bribe him:

"Listen, I have here watches, jewelry nobody had seen us, you can have it all!"

Nothing. My father offered him money, he said he would dig it up and give it to the Lithuanian - he would not budge.

Then, on the road from the factory to Niemenczyn where the Jews were held my father tried to get physically close to him but there was no way. The guy delivered him to where the Jews of Niemenczyn were held - in the synagogue. They told the Jews that they would be taken to the ghetto of Wilno, they were going to march the 20 km. to Wilno. Everybody was taking their belongings - their pillows and teakettles. My father told them:

"Fellow Jews, don't bother to pack and drag all your belongings, they are going to kill us".

Nobody believed him.

They took the 700 people and they marched them on the road to Wilno and for every three Jews there was one Lithuanian shooter. For the three here there is a Lithuanian on the right side, for the next three there is a Lithuanian on the left side, for the next three on the







right side again - there were lots of executioners. They were walking on the main road and about six or seven km. out of town they told them to march into the forest - there was a meadow between two huge forests. They made a right turn - it was obvious that they were not going to Wilno.

The people marched and then, as my father told me later, the leading Lithuanian signalled with his hand and said something and all the Lithuanians aligned themselves - those on the left side of the Jews ran forward and joined those on the right side and they started to shoot into the mass of people.

The people were being hit and fell, a lot of people threw themselves on the ground instinctively, some stupidly climbed the trees, which was an idiotic thing to do, but in such a moment they did not know what they did, so they climbed trees.

My father did not lose his sanity, he did not fall or climb a tree, he just stood upright and looked at what was happening. He said he stayed upright because if he was to be hit he wanted to be killed rather than wounded. So everybody is falling, running, climbing - he is the only one standing there and nothing happens. He was clever enough not to run in the direction everybody was running but ran towards the shooters, because if he ran towards the main road he was sure there would be guards there who would pick him out. If you run away from the shooters you are a target immediately - they see you very well, but if you run tangentially - not directly towards them but a little to the side of them they cannot shoot at each other. There was shooting going on, he was running, there was another guy running after him and then he hears a woman's voice calling

"Mr. Gdud, wait"







He looked back and it was the pharmacist's wife, Esther Bernstein. He called to her:

"Esther, run, run, run for your life, run after me!" She ran after him and they ran away into the other woods. I heard all this from my father when I joined him three months later.

In 1983 when we went to Michael's and Susan's wedding in Connecticut I contacted a group of farmers, survivors from Niemenczyn. It turned out that one of them, Yankele Leifer, was the guy who along with my father carried a ninety year old woman (his grandmother, who was unable to walk on her own) to the place of execution. At the execution they put Grandma down on the ground and when he saw my father take off, Yankele followed. His Grandmother was the owner of the Niemenczyn bakery. After talking for a while Yankele Leifer inquired about my father and told me that if it were not for my father's example at the execution, he would not be alive today.

It turns out that his wife Sarah's brother and father were in the jail of Niemenczyn together with my mother and brother and were taken to the execution three days later - as will be seen below.

Now my Mother and brother were hiding in the pile of wood. Two days later my brother who was fourteen became very restless, he declared that he had enough of it so he got out. There was a shepherd there who saw him. A lot of the Jews of Niemenczyn, nearly a hundred out of seven hundred had escaped from the execution but at the end of three years only about twelve survived. They perished from hunger, exposure, illness and were killed by the Polish "White partisans", the so called A.K. - "The Territorial Army" whose primary business was the killing of Jews. They were much more deadly than the police because







they were the sons of the local people who knew the terrain well - all the possible hideouts.

However, initially the police were combing the place for the hundred runaways, so a policeman was there and when he asked the shepherd "Did you see any Jews?"

he answered

"Yah I saw a young one, he went into the forest there".

They grabbed my brother and took him to the police station in Niemenczyn. They caught twenty more of the runaways. They kept them all at the police station to be executed.

When my brother did not come back my mother waited till night and then went to the house of one of the workers and asked what happened to Motel. They told her that he had been caught and taken to the police station to be killed next day.

My mother went to the police station and gave herself up - she wanted to accompany my brother on his last journey. On the next day they killed them.

I heard the execution but I did not know that it was my mother and brother. I found out about it two weeks later from the Poles. I was hiding in the neighboring forest and heard the terrible shooting at ten past one of the second day of Rosh Hashana in September of 1941.

I don't quite know how to describe the next few years - a lot of stories and a lot of hardships - these momentary terrors were nothing compared to the hardships of three years of survival in the forests in the cold and hunger. With Avreml Deich we stayed near where I picked him up one day only, then we went to where his sister and brother were







hiding five miles away - at night we crossed the main road and joined them - I stayed with them in a bunker ( a leftover of W.W.I ) for two weeks. Every night their Polish friend who was a shoemaker (they had been in the leather business) would bring us food and would tell us what was going on - that was how I found out about the execution of my mother and brother. There was a mean forester there who would walk around the forest shooting blanks just to scare any Jews who might possibly be hiding there. One day somebody (we did not know who it was) was walking by and out of curiosity looked into the old bunker. He looked in and we did not move, it was dark. Then he squinted and really looked and he went away - but we didn't know - had he seen us? We couldn't take a chance - we had to split. They had some other "maybe" arrangements with somebody else but a fourth guy was a burden so I said OK, I'll go my own way, that was when I split out from them.

The house of the Paszkowskis, the family of Felicja Paszkowska who had come to warn us lay halfway between the factory and the town of Niemenczyn. They also had a new uninhabited house that they had just built. I went and climbed up to the attic of the new house and stayed there. At night I would climb down, knock on their door and they would feed me - I didn't even tell them that I stayed in the attic because I was scared. From the attic window I could see everything - the police, the same Steven and his three buddies would go by the entrance while I watched. That was where I would hide out at first. Then I felt that perhaps I shouldn't call on them every night so I wandered away. At first I was hiding out in the neighborhood of my father's territory, sitting under huge trees all day, coming out at night and calling on a peasant asking for food. They knew me and they all fed me and







were kind to me. If some did not know me and asked who I was, when I answered I am Gdud's son - oh, then they would feed me and be nice to me but they could not keep me because anyone caught hiding a Jew was executed. So I would go back to the forest, moving from place to place.

Then, through the efforts of my father's workers, the brothers Konstanty (Kosciuk) and Vincenty (Vincuk) Liszykowski and of Mrs Paszkowski I got a letter from my father through a woman messenger - ( Genia, the stepdaughter of Konsiewicz) in which he told me to trust Genia and follow her; I did and she brought me to my father.

How was this arranged? My father had written a letter to Kosciuk Liszykowski who then told him that periodically I reappear in another village and if my father would write a letter to me he would have it delivered to me.

I came and found the letter saying that I should come to a certain place ( the Paszkowskis) on November 1st (or was it the 3rd?), All Saint's Day. It was dangerous for me to move - I didn't have my sheepskin and I was so cold, so cold. Once I planted myself somewhere it was hard to move. Some nights I was afraid to go out if it was very rainy and foggy - I was afraid of getting lost, so I wouldn't eat for two days - I had to hibernate.

My father had run away with Esther Bernstein, she was a lost soul, totally helpless. She used to be a well-to-do lady and she never used to go into the villages, didn't know how to live in the forest. My father was a real forester. She followed him and he called on one of his workers, Stas Konsiewicz, an alcoholic. He used to be always broke and always ask credit from my father. My father would always smile and







give him the money and always treated him kindly. So he called on this Konsiewicz (K). K was a poor peasant, he was 37 years old. Maria, his wife was 50. He was her third husband. Maria had a daughter Genia from her first husband and Genia had an illegitimate child - Oles, a boy just a few months old. Maria cared about the household - feeding the animals and the family. The young girl cared about herself and the child. Stas K, the third husband cared about nothing - all he needed was his booze. One day Stas comes to my father and says: there is a young Jewess here, eating breakfast with us, she ran away from the execution and she is lost. What is her name? Libka Rudaszevski. Her brother used to be my father's employee. My father said: listen, K, you know that if they catch you hiding two Jews or three Jews the verdict for you is the same. I'll have to feed her - don't worry, I'll feed her. So, he was hiding three Jews - he doesn't care about anything but his booze, so my father has to give him money for the booze, but my father had a terrible problem. When K gets drunk he beats the shit out of his wife and her daughter, he destroys the house, he breaks the windows, the door. The daughter comes with a black eye, all beaten up screaming bloody murder at my father:

"Don't give him money, look what he did to us! If you give him money for booze I'm going to call the police and you will all be killed!"

On the other hand money is one of K's motivations so he can drink, he also likes to play cards and he invariably loses. My father tells him:

"Listen Stas, you play cards, don't drink".

"Gdud, I want just a pint, just one pint".

"OK, one pint but no more."

Pretty soon he is done with the pint and wants more.







"Eh Stas" - he would kiss my father and hug him and beg him for just one more. And the women would say

"Don't give him money!" My father managed somehow with his Talmudic approaches to float between all these problems.

There were other perils in our fugitive life. We spent one summer on a self-created hummock in a wooded marsh. Throughout the nights we carried bags of dirt from the neighboring fields to elevate a flat, less soggy piece of ground. We felt more protected there since few people would want to look around that place - they would have to slosh through knee-deep muddy water.

However, soon enough we found out that besides the two Gduds there were other dangerous creatures crawling around. These were vipers whose bites were fatal since we could not seek medical help - once you were bitten you were pretty much doomed. In the silent nights their rustling movements were audible and would alert us to their presence. During the daytime however, with the presence of adventitious environmental sounds their movements were hardly audible and the vipers could only be detected visually.

One day, as I was sitting practicing drawing and sighting with my gun, my father screamed out: VIPER!! Indeed one was just two feet away from my thigh. I jumped, very shaken and my father went after the venomous snake killing it with the heel of his boot.

For many years after the war I still remained phobic to the sight of any snake. It was only in about 1970 when Pearl could remark:

"I guess you are cured of the fear of snakes" when I ran to grab a camera to take a picture of a King snake rather than a BB gun that I used to shoot them with.







Although I had never fired live ammunition during the war since I only possessed nine bullets for my Nagan (powerful Russian revolver), through practice I became very proficient in the handling of my gun. I would sit in the swamp, put the gun in various places and grab it with great speed with either the right or left hand, sighting it on a target.

Even years later when I wanted to impress Pearl (then my girl-friend) in the amusement park in Italy with my marksmanship, I would hit the center of the target with my first shot - this would snap our photograph. We still have these souvenir pictures in our album.

Living would get harder in the cold months. The elements were severe for anybody, but especially for those like us who were poorly dressed, poorly nourished and scared. One winter was particularly bad. My father was very ill. He had fever, chills and a painful swelling in his neck. We had been alerted that the police were snooping in the neighboring villages, perhaps for moonshine, but finding an incidental Jew was always a bonus. We had to get out from the Konsiewicz house, get on the main road and from there make our way into the frozen marsh. We couldn't go directly because our footprints in the snow would give us away. We dug a depression in the snow and lay in it covered with a light colored blanket. My father was delirious - I feared that I would lose him then. I was thinking that if only I knew what to do for him I could save him. I realized then how vital the skill of a physician is. I thought then that if I survive the Nazis that will be the skill that I will want to learn. It is the most important job one can do. I'll become a doctor. Later my father's neck-gland abscess drained and he recovered.







It has been frequently said that surviving the Holocaust was a matter of sheer luck - this is true to a large extent. However, I feel that if it were not for my father's wisdom, his guidance and protection I wouldn't have survived the Second World War. I was fed up, angry and rebellious. This attitude had in fact cost my brother his life. The description of some of the episodes which took place during those years will emphasize the truth of these feelings.

We were getting low on money. As you may remember, my father had buried a box with money, gold coins and Swiss watches in the attic of the last apartment we had lived in in Wilno. He made a mnemonic map of the location of the box (with exact dimensions of distances from the marking points - the attic was huge, encompassing numerous apartments). Each of our family members was drilled about remembering the location of this box.

At this point of the Nazi occupation, however, there was no way for a Jew to reach that place - we were not even in Wilno. Later on, when I had to escape from Wilno, I had to swim accross the river during the night.

My father assessed the situation and decided that he could trust and confide in Maria Konsiewicz. There was risk for us in the sharing of this information with her: the local peasantry was poor and greedy, the life of a Jew was totally worthless. At one point, when salt was scarce, the Germans would reward a peasant with two Kg. of salt for a Jew, dead or alive.

Thus, if Maria wanted to inherit the valuable box she could easily denounce us to the police, keep the money and get praise from the Nazis. My father felt that her moral fiber was such that she could be trust-







ed. She was explained thoroughly where the box was, made a trip to the city, sneaked up to the attic and followed my father's exact instructions. She was late to return and we had a very anxious and fearful day. My father was reciting Tehilim (psalms) all day long. Maria arrived with a triumphant, smiling face and handed over the wrapped box to my father without ever unwrapping it.

I vividly remember her face with her light bluish eyes, reddish wind-tanned facial skin, dark brown hair interspersed with some grey and a half-smiling, cheerful face. She always liked to joke - so did my father and there was a warm feeling between them. My father adored Maria's infant grandson Oles( Genia's son) and would play with him for hours.

I've often wondered whether Lenny's fascination with infants was inherited diagenically, skipping one generation (me).

Stas used to tease his wife: " You have buried two husbands, but I'll bury you (becuse he was younger) And she would smile and say: "Well this is still to be seen". What happened one winter was that K got drunk and on his way home he fell into a well. He was screaming bloody murder, the neighbors fished him out and brought him home. It was before the antibiotics, he got pneumonia and died. Before he died he was delirious, he had high fever and all the time he was saying: "Manka (his wife), protect my Jews, take care of my Jews, don't let my Jews down." And you know, I had such a soft spot for alcoholics, it stayed with me for years.

Once the police came to the Konsiewicz house - this was another very scary moment in my life. The arrangement we had with K during the







winter was that we were hiding in the spare room of his house where they kept all kind of supplies - grain, feed. In that room there was another little separation where we stayed. There my father made a double wall so that in case of danger we would sneak into that double wall. We had a code: if the dog barked we got out of the little room into the first room. If it was any official or the police, whoever was home would knock three times - that meant police, get in behind the double wall. One day the dog was barking and my father said:

"Three knocks, police, get in!"

"I say no, no, it was only two knocks" - he gave me a good kick saying get in, idiot! So Libka, the young girl got in, Esther Bernstein got in, I got in.

There was a coat masking the entrance - a temporary thing, the entrance was not visible but if somebody would touch the wall he would know that it was a fake one. I hear words in Lithuanian:

"And what is here?" and Genia, the daughter who did not know whether we managed to sneak in remains silent, then she says:

"Well, supplies".

"And what is behind this door?"

Then he comes in, it is pitch dark so he lights a cigarette lighter. My heart was pounding because we did not have weapons at that time (that was 1942, we got weapons later) so if he had caught us we would be dead ducks. It was so close that I heard him breath and thought he could hear the pounding of my heart. I was also scared that Libka, who was a very stupid kid, as a matter of fact she was my classmate and in school we called her Libke the calf, very dumb kid, might say Oy! or something like that. I grabbed her hand signalling: Keep quiet! Keep quiet! Finally he just walked away.







What was the problem?

K's brother was a thief - he was stealing chickens from the neighbors. Finally the neighbors got tired and denounced him to the police for stealing their chickens. When the police didn't find the chickens at his house the neighbors said :

"Yah, he takes them to his brother, the other thief and they feast on them together."

So the police came to look for chickens - they looked all over, even looked in the stove to see if there was any cooking going on and they missed four Jews!

Our trips from Konsiewicz to Paszkowski would take us through a village where a forester, a known Jew hunter, would play cards sipping moonshine with his buddies. They were armed. My father and I would take great pains and walk through a swampy field away from the main road to avoid passing through that village. After we obtained our guns through Paszkowski I quarrelled with my father and refused to take the precaution of skirting the village. I marched through the center of the village and kicked off the barking village dogs. I had my finger on the cocked trigger of my gun and was ready to shoot it out. Fortunately only the dogs showed up.

All the wanderings from one location to another were always made in the full dark of the night. I knew the terrain, the forests and the fields with great precision. On a dark, cloudy, rainy night when you are in a dense pine forest you walk as if blindfolded. The only way you manage not to get lost and come out on the other side of the forest is if you walk with one foot in the wheel-track of the dirt road. If you run into anybody you don't ask questions, you shoot first un-







less you can jump off to the side behind a tree. One time I went from where we stayed to the Paszkowskis and could not return before daylight. My Father was very anxious about my fate. Next night while I was walking back he decided to go to look for me. We always used exactly the same route. We met in the dark but an instinct kept us from shooting each other. After we passed each other without killing one another my father turned around and called my name.

Another experience in hiding, less scary but excruciating, happened to us when, in our periodic foreys, we came to stay the day with a friendly worker named Ilewicz. When the dogs started to bark while Ilewicz was out, we climbed into a niche behind the chimney on top of the oven - this is a very warm, comfortable place used for sleeping - but not while the front of the oven is used for cooking. We were hiding there when a young man came to flirt with Genia, the sixteen year old orphan niece of Ilewicz. The man was a stranger, we could not trust him - we could lose our lives and betray the Ilewicz, they would be executed for harboring Jews - so we were stuck.

While the adults were out the young man tried to make out with Genia and stayed on and on - we were stuck there for hours. I had to urinate badly and in desperation took off my boot and filled it up. Little did I know, when I was running away from Steven and attempted to take off my boots to run faster, how many uses this boot would have for me. And now, following this immense relief and ecstasy came the agony. You see, Genia had to prepare dinner for the family and was going to bake "bliny", (a kind of huge Bielorussian pancake) so she had to put on the fire in the oven. The heat created was unbearable - we







sweated so much that we dried out to such a point of dehydration and exhaustion that we were moribund by the time we could come down.

One day when we came to Paszkowski he said:

"Listen, I don't want to know where you are hiding, but if you happen to stay with Konsiewicz, get out immediately, the word is that he is hiding Jews".

My father did not acknowledge that we were staying with K, but asked what made people suspect?

"Listen, he is a poor peasant but somehow he always has money now to drink and to play cards. He never wins, always loses and he always comes up with more money - the word is that he must be hiding Jews, it won't be long before the police will come there."

When we got this warning that our place was possibly betrayed we got out. The first thing my father did was to find a place for the two women. He went to another of his workers and asked him to shelter them, my father would pay him for hiding them as well as for their food. My father had supported the two ladies during the three years.

The two of us ended up with a peasant family of three - two young parents and a baby whose names escape me after so many years but I think that the man's first name was Josef. They were scared but after my father had shown them carefully the potential for an undiscoverable hiding place they agreed to hide us.

With Josef's help my father constructed a double wall in the room where we slept. The space between the walls could be reached only from the cellar through a trap door which could be lifted up for entry and then weighted down by one of us standing on top of it.

One day in 1947 a tall man comes to Hadera from Haifa and is look-







ing for Dov Gdud. My father said, " I am Dov Gdud." " Dov Gdud, I want to shake your hand, I came from Haifa to shake your hand." So my father says: "Fine lets shake hands." The man says:

"O.K. now I can go back to Haifa." My father asks: "Who are you, why did you want to shake my hand?" "I wanted to shake the hand of the man who saved the life of my wife."

"Who is your wife?"

"Libke Rudaszewski."

We visited them since, Libke the calf has two wonderful sons in the Israeli army.

There is another act of generosity of my father's which was very important for me, the impression it made influenced my behavior throughout my life.

In 1943 we got a letter from my father's very good friend Moishe Beckenstein who wrote to us in Yiddish that his money had run out. Their family of four plus another were sheltered by a Polish family but he was out of money and he asked my father for a loan because without it they would not be sheltered any more. My father knew his handwriting, it was authentic and my father told me that he was going to split his money with Moishe. I got furious.

"What do you mean, we are going to split our money with Beckenstein? Listen we are two years into the German occupation, who knows how long it will go on! What about us, what about me? You are also paying for Esther and Libka. Who knows how long this war will go on?"

My father looked at me and said: "My son, do you know whether a month from now, a week from now or even a day from now you or I will be alive - do you have any assurance that we will need that money - ever?"







We have no right to gamble on the presumption of our survival and keep the money for ourselves - we may be dead tomorrow. This money can buy five lives today". I was very angry with him, I did not want him to do it but he did it.

That was a lesson I never forgot. It had an incredible impact on my life in many, many ways. The fact was that we survived, the two women survived and the five people of the Beckenstein family survived, they are all in Israel - the parents have died since.

During the summers we hid in the vast wooded swamps bordered by two highways near the town of Bezdany. Some runaway Russian prisoners of war stayed in the swamp too and I got friendly with them. We decided to sabotage the railroad (used by the German military) in Bezdany. When we got there everything seemed quiet but then suddenly we were in the glare of spotlights and we were captured. The Germans did not know that I was a Jew, but the Lithuanian police spotted me immediately. We were taken to the Lukiszki prison in Wilno. While there I managed to send a note through some Jews who worked there to Kamenmacher, the father of a very dear friend of mine. Kamenmacher was a very influential man in the ghetto. His advice to me was that my only chance was to answer the call for any craftsmen that the Germans might need - no matter what trade.

Indeed about thirty of these craftsmen were released from Lukiszki and we were marching toward the ghetto when I slipped away from the group, ran into a courtyard and hid in the outhouse hole. I climbed out when it was dark and had to maneuver through the streets of Wilno in spite of the curfew, listening for steps or voices of the patrol and evading them as best I could. I was trying to reach my father in the Bezdany







area, this lay across the Wilja river and the bridge was guarded so I swam across this rather wide and rapid river and got to my father unharmed but I never saw these Russians again.

In the late spring and early summer of 1944 the German armies were retreating. We were just East of Wilno and my father was worried that major battles for the city could take place near us. To protect ourselves against just such an eventuality we built a "bunker" at the edge of the forest. Inside we stocked it with loaves of bread and water. The roof of the bunker was flat on the ground, camouflaged with greenery and a young pine tree was inserted on top of a removable trap door. A metal pipe served as air access. A saw was stored inside the bunker to be used to procure a fresh pine tree when needed. Indeed, in early July of 1944 we had to use that shelter. We were sitting there when one night my father remarked:

"If it lasts much longer Esther and Libke will die of hunger while we have all this bread here". I said:

"I can deliver it to them!"

My father was unwilling to risk my going but I assured him that I could run there in no time - it was only about 5 Km. I was determined to do it and I was also anxious to get out. On my way, as I came to the edge of a field interposed between two forests I stood still, looking and listening before getting out onto the field. It was a clear night; I heard a whinny of a horse and a few minutes later four or five horsemen emerged from the forest across the field from me. These were the deadly Polish "White partisans", the A.K. I delivered the bread and was very happy to be back with my father.







A few days later the fighting quieted down and it seemed that the Germans were out. We were sitting in the attic of Josef's house when one morning I decided that the time has come when I could walk from Josef's house to that of a friendly peasant named Bula in broad daylight. We always used to visit him at night only. My father begged me to refrain for a few more days, it was such a tumultuous time and one could get killed so easily. I felt that I had waited long enough to fulfill my desire to be able to move about in broad daylight.

I came off the attic and headed toward the road. It was only a few kilometers. As I was walking on the road in a vast, long field I suddenly saw a group of men heading towards me. As the distance diminished I realized that they were armed and carried rifles. My heart sank in: they were civilians and thus almost certainly the deadly "White Polish Partisans". I had to decide quickly on a course of action. If I turned back they would shoot me. If I went on my powerful "Nagan" revolver had only seven bullets to shoot before I had to reload it. I did not think that my chances were good in a shoot-out. I decided to speed up walking toward them and get to a bridge over a small stream before they got there. I went off the road just before the bridge and ran alongside the shrubbery on the shore of the stream - I disappeared before I could be found by them.

Later my father told me that these were the hardest moments of all the three years for him. He was watching the entire event from the attic of Josef's house and was totally impotent to avert the looming disaster.

The frontline finally moved westward, the Germans retreated and my father and I crawled out to greet the first Soviet tank. We must have







seemed very odd to the Red soldiers since they asked repeatedly who in the world we were. Our hair and beards unkempt, our clothes dirty and ragged, we didn't look like anybody they had encountered before. When we tried to embrace them, telling them that we were Jews just liberated by them from the Nazis, they started to jeer:

"We know your kind, your people are now moving from Novosibirsk to Tomsk"

(cities deep in the heart of Siberia, away from danger.)

"No, remarked another one, by now they are moving their furniture to liberated Leningrad!"

We felt thunderstruck and scared - this was a lawless time, they could have knocked us off without ever having to account for it. The young lieutenant in charge of the tank interposed:

"That is enough, boys". They gave us soup and fed us, asked some questions and let us go. We felt terribly let down.

We stayed out of sight for a few days and then the liberating Soviet armies took the city of Wilno. We were back under Soviet rule. Despite our experience with the tank soldiers there was euphoria in our hearts and celebration all around us but we returned to a Niemenczyn devoid of all our family and friends. The war was going on. The Russians were appealing for army volunteers and in spite of my father's protests I went to the mobilization point in the town hall and enlisted. I wanted to kill Nazis. I felt terribly guilty for not having killed them when I had a chance to do so. There was a crowd of young people there, we were directed to march to Wilno, pass a screening exam and then we would be sent out to fight. We were marching the 18-20 kilometer stretch from Niemenczyn to Wilno. My father walked







with me nagging me about my stupidity:

"You survived the three horrible years, you are the only surviving member of my entire family. The war is nearing to an end and now you want to lose your life?"

I did not want to listen to all that. When we came to Antokol, (the Eastern suburb of Wilno) my father asked me:

" Won't you stop and visit our friend, Mr Krukowski?" ( a Pole who was our contact and part of our support through the three years of Nazi occupation.)

Indeed we stopped and my father embraced his pre-war customer and friend whom I personally was meeting for the first time. After we visited and my father told Krukowski where I was heading, Krukowski exclaimed in disbelief:

"You want to go to the battlefield? Look at yourself in the mirror - you don't even have the strength to carry a rifle now. Why don't you put some meat on your bones first. Recover and rest up for a couple of weeks!"

I replied: "In a few weeks the war may be over, the time to go is now!"

Neither my father's nor Krukowski's speeches were convincing. However, that night something powerfully convincing happened. The German Luftwaffe (the Air Force) bombed the newly liberated city, causing incredible damage. We were in the cellar of the Krukowski family with bombs exploding all around. I was terrified and my fear did not escape my father's eye. He probably was frightened too, but I did not notice it.

"You think that this is bad? This is just a child's play compared to what you will get at the front!" In the morning I acceded to my fa-









My father shortly after liberation  
by the Red Army in 1944.



My father and I a year later in Bukarest, Rumania - early  
summer 1945.







ther's pleas without great difficulty...

There is another story. We never hid our experiences from our children even when they were very young. Some of our friends did not talk about it until their children were much older but we were so imbued with our memories that we always shared them with our family. When they were little the kids were always after me:

"How many Germans did you kill?" They knew that I had weapons after a certain point. I never answered, I used delaying tactics by saying I'll tell you when you get bigger. Out of the three kids it was Anne who said when she was about fourteen:

"Dad, I'm big now, you said that when I'll be big you will tell me - so tell me, how many Germans did you kill?" "OK Anne, I'll tell you the story".

One day in 1943 I was walking around with an escaped Russian prisoner, a young kid (so was I). I had a handgun. We walked into a peasant's barn, I knew the place. After a while of living in that area I knew the voices of dogs about five Km. around. A dog would bark in one place, I would identify where it was; half an hour later another dog would bark which I knew was closer and I would know that somebody was walking this way - the topography was so familiar to me that I could do this. I would always walk at night, in the darkest of the nights I could find places in the forest and anywhere in the villages. In this place we would come to the barn, sneak in in the morning to sleep - we took shelter there. One day we fell asleep and then the dogs were barking. I looked through the cracks in between the logs of the barn wall and saw that there were five people in a horse carriage, three civilians and two policemen. The Russian guy said "Hey, we split!" but







I said that this was no good, because there is a big field behind the barn and we would be exposed, they have rifles, they can pick us off. Let us see what happens. They walked into the stable and he wanted to run but I said we can't make it, lets just watch. They came out, walked back to the carriage, talked among themselves and then the policemen headed toward our barn - now what do we do? I had a handgun. I say OK, there are two halves to the barn door, so that as they enter we can hide on both sides - you on the left and I on the right. You keep quiet, just have your hand in your pocket, push it out pretending that you have a gun and I will do the rest. The two Lithuanian policemen with rifles on their shoulders and handguns in their belts open the barn door and they march in - I jump out and scream in Lithuanian "RANKOS AUKSTIN" - "Hands up!"

One of them goes for his gun, I yell

"Drop, freeze!"

He sees me with the Nagan (that is an equivalent of a 38 but with a long barrel so that the bullets are carried quite far) and he sees the other guy and he stands. Then I commanded them one thing at a time:

"You on the right open your belt! Let it drop. Take three steps forward. Stop! You on the left move, open your belt. Drop the gun. Take three steps forward. Stop!"

When they carried it out we came and collected the handguns - now I had two handguns and the Russian had one. Then I commanded them to drop the rifles, we collected the rifles and now I say:

"You march." We walk out, they are marching in front of us, we have two rifles and three handguns and the other three are civilians. We were heading toward the swamps with the two policemen from Niemenczyn -







they were from there. The Russian tells me:

"I'll take care of this one, you take care of that one."

"No, I say I'll take care of both of them, one for my mother, one for my brother." We are marching into the swamps, remote from the civilians; the Lithuanians start to implore and I scream:

"You bloody murderers, you killed my mother, you killed my brother!"

They cried:

"We swear we had nothing to do with that, we were not even there, we had nothing to do with that!" They fell to their knees and begged and I just couldn't kill them. I told them - run! vanish! I always felt ashamed about not having killed them, but when I told it to Anne, she said: "Dad, I'm so glad you've never killed anybody"...

What happened following the liberation, how I left Russia and wandered throughout Eastern Europe and finally came with the "Brecht" to Italy, studied Medicine, met Pearl in our Student's Hostel in Torino and came to America seven years later I'll tell you some other evening, hopefully before the Messiah comes...









Felicja Paszkowski and William Good meeting again after 43 years. Victory! I reached her penetrating the Red Bureaucracy!



Panorama of our native city Wilno, early July 1987.







## RETURN TO WILNO AND NIEMENCZYN AFTER 43 YEARS

Some years ago we received a letter from Israel from a writer named Karpinowicz. In it he described that when in Poland as a member of an Israeli delegation to a memorial for the Warsaw ghetto uprising he was accosted by a Pole who asked him whether he spoke Polish. Learning that Karpinowicz was a native of Poland, the Pole asked him whether he knew a family from Wilno named Gdud. The man, Leonard Paszkowski said that his mother, Felicja Paszkowska had helped the Gduds to survive during the Nazi occupation. The writer took down all the pertinent information and later published a "wanted" ad in various Israeli newspapers. In result I received several letters from my friends in Israel and even one from the writer Karpinowicz who inquired whether I was the right person and gave me the address of Leonard Paszkowski in Poland. After writing to Karpinowicz to thank him and assure him that indeed I was the Gdud he wanted I wrote in great excitement to Paszkowski in Tychy, Poland to verify whether he was the son of "Josefowa" - that was how I knew her, so I checked whether his father's name was Josef. When he assured me of this we began a wonderful, affectionate and lively correspondence. Leonard (Lolek) is a prolific writer. He wrote about his family, life in Poland and in Niemenczyn, his Mother's health, the people I knew. He even sent us Polish holy pictures. Lolek is a retired miner, married, his wife's name is Danusia. They have two sons and one grandson, Piotrus. His mother and sister live still in Niemenczyn, it is hard for him to get permission to visit them. At first we tried to send Lolek packages with things that are scarce in







Poland but the better articles were stolen so we send him cashiers checks which he can deposit into a special dollar account from which he can remove dollars to use in the "dollar stores" for merchandise unavailable otherwise. Many of the checks we sent Lolek he was using for his grandsons "Piotrus house". I also sent him the antibiotics he requested for Piotrus.

I petitioned Yad VaShem, both in Jerusalem and in Warsaw, to have the Paszkowski family honored as belonging to the "Righteous among the Nations", describing what they did for us during the Nazi occupation both in English as well as in Polish. This rather involved procedure is not yet completed. When I asked Libke Rudaszewski for corroboration, she remained worthy of her nickname the "calf", she answered that she did not remember the Paszkowskis.

I repeatedly asked Lolek what were his Mother's needs. He checked with her and she would have liked a hearing aid hidden in the eyeglass frame. Regrettably a hearing aid has to be fitted by an otologist to a person's hearing defect. The best I could come up with was a kind of funnel to be put in a persons ear and turned towards the speaker. Lolek said she is still too vain to use it.

Lolek repeatedly invited us to visit him in Poland but what I really wanted was to go to Niemenczyn. Pearl was reluctant to go to the Soviet Union - she only agreed to join her dear friend Mira Van Doren to go with a group to Leningrad, Wilno and Moscow. Lolek had written to us that he would be in Lida ( a town not far from Wilno). When we decided to go on a group trip to the Soviet Union which included a visit to Wilno we wrote to Lolek about the date of our arrival there.

Lolek answered that he would try to be with his mother in Niemenczyn







at that time, he also gave us the telephone number of his nephew Stas in Niemenczyn but warned us not to call from our hotel where the phones would be bugged.

Before our departure for the Soviet Union at the Kennedy airport in New York the travel agency enjoined us not to admit that any of us spoke Russian, were born in the Soviet Union or had relatives or friends there - apparently that was a demand of Inturist. I said immediately that this was out of the question - my main reason for going to Wilno was my great desire to see the people who had risked their lives to save mine. I was sure that I would be able to communicate my feelings, even to the Inturist.

Upon our arrival in Wilno ( now Vilnius) it was strange to find Lithuanian as the prevailing language - it used to be Polish and Yiddish, some Bielorussian. Now everybody had to know Lithuanian and some Russian, the Poles knew Polish, of course.

Our group was taken to the new 19 floor hotel Lietuva, (a skyscraper for Wilno) which stood on the spot (Wilkomirska 28) where Pearls grandfathers apartment house and small industrial buildings used to be. We were taken for a sightseeing ride by our nice Lithuanian guide, Vilte.

She readily agreed when I told her that we would like to wander on our own in our native city, but when I said that on the day after we wanted to go to Niemenczyn, she was distressed: Oh no, that is out of the city limits. When I told her how vital this was for me she took us to the Inturist desk. of our hotel. When the Inturist lady repeated that it was out of city limits and therefore forbidden, she asked:

"And why do you want to go there anyway?"







"Because that is where I was born, that is where the people who saved my life are. I have waited 43 years and came many thousands of kilometers to see them. If you give me trouble I'll go to Moscow and get permission from Misha Sergeyevich (Gorbachev's nickname).

The Inturist agent was impressed and said OK, I will make the request, you can come back tonight.

"I will come back tonight but the answer better be DA!!" (positive).

We started to walk around, my old apartment house on Kalvaryjska street next to the Green Bridge was near to the hotel. It was built in the style of a mediaeval castle standing on the shore of the river Wilja. Instead of residential apartments it now housed the School of Architecture with its offices and lecture halls. We went in - the door to our old apartment was locked. Impudently I pushed in the door - Pearl visualized us ending in Syberia for destroying State property. She was watching on the stairs to warn me if somebody was coming. I roamed inside what used to be our apartment. All the inside walls were removed to form a lecture hall. We took pictures from the balcony and went to the secluded green nook with a view of the city downstairs where I used to do my homework.

We met our dear friend Irena Vaisaite then. Irena is a professor of Western literature at the Pedagogical Institute of Vilnius, she is the adopted sister of Jack Brauns. We wandered around, saw the apartment house on Zawalna 2 where Pearl's family used to live before the war. We also saw the apartment of Mira Van Doren's family nearby.

When we returned that evening the Inturist lady said: OK, you can go to Niemenczyn for four hours.







Four hours! That is nothing - I need a day or two!

It is very expensive, you'll have to pay \$130 for even the four hours.

I will pay whatever you want, but I need more time!

Four hours, take it or leave it.

I took it, hoping to be able to bribe the "guide" (who would keep me under surveillance) and stay longer. I made arrangements to go from ten to two. I called Paszkowski's nephew Stas and told him that we would be there tomorrow morning. Lolek and Danusia were staying in the house of his sister Lilka with whom their mother Felicja is living.

However, there came an unexpected alteration in our plans: our group was going to Ponary next morning, from ten to twelve. I felt that we should grab the chance of going there even though Pearl would have preferred to go there privately with our friend Irena, without the tourists. We changed our appointment with Inturist from 10 AM to 1 PM but I had no chance of going to a public phone to call Stas about our change of plans.

I felt indescribably strange on being in Ponary again - the monument, the inscription on which there was no mention that most of the killed were Jews, the many, many graves.

I couldn't orient myself which was my mass grave and in which direction lay the house of the kind peasant who had given me a shirt after I ran away from the grave in 1941. I finally found an old caretaker who remembered how the place looked decades ago.

Both Pearl and I wrote in the visitors book of the Ponary museum.

It was getting late, almost one o'clock, but our group was not yet ready to leave. Steven Sherman, our wonderful group leader, suddenly found two Israelis - a member of the Knesset and a journalist who,







when Steven told them that one of the members of his group was almost executed here in 1941 were very eager to meet me. I did so very hurriedly, I was frantic - we were late. I was wasting the precious hours allowed me in Niemenczyn

Mira had a wonderful idea - ask Vilte (our guide) to call Inturist and delay our departure from one to two PM. Vilte kindly did so and was able to arrange the delay - what a relief!

We came to the hotel and found Regina, our Inturist "guide" waiting for us. When we came to the car, there was also a driver named Slava, very formal in suit and tie. That complicated matters - we were hoping to bribe the guide to let us stay longer, but with two of them there one would check up on the other. As we were driving the 18 km to Niemenczyn I asked Regina what language she preferred to speak ( this was important, the Lithuanians and the Poles hate each other and they both hate the Russians). She answered that her mother was Polish and her father Lithuanian so we could speak Polish to her. We took advantage of the half hour it took us to drive to Niemenczyn to tell Regina about what Felicja Paszkowski had done for us during the Nazi occupation. She seemed impressed and well-wishing.

When we came to Lilka's house where Felicja was living - she had given the old Paszkowski house to Lilka's son Stas, Stas let us in but said that since we were so late Lolek and Danusia got worried that there may be trouble and went out; they had come illegally to meet us, they did not have a permit for Niemenczyn, only for Lida - maybe 50 km. away. Lilka went out to work after waiting, Stas was going to bring them all. Grandma was in her bedroom - I went in and saw Josefowa sitting on her bed, older but still lovely.







We embraced and cried - we couldn't stop crying for maybe twenty minutes. Regina, the Inturist "guide" must have felt that she was intruding and was decent enough (even though she must have been ordered to keep us under constant observation) to say that she would visit a friend in Niemenczyn and would return in twenty minutes. Lolek and Dariusia were back by that time, so I took advantage of the unsupervised moment to unload the gifts we brought - jeans, clothes, perfume, money and so on. The love and happiness was like a radiance in that room, Pearl felt. By that time Stas brought Lilka from her work. When Regina came back the Paszkowskis brought out their own ham, cheese and preserves, we sat around the table eating, drinking tea and reminiscing about those horrible times of 1941 - 1944. As we talked I happened to ask: "By the way, where are the Liszykowskis now?" "Oh, Konstanty died of lung cancer, but Manka, his wife and his son are here in Niemenczyn and so is his brother Vincent." "How about Vince Gasperowicz?" "Oh, he still is living in the same house in Lipolata not far from where the turpentine factory used to be." "How about the Ilewicz?" "Genia, their niece still lives in that village." My God! I have to see all of them! I also wanted to put flowers on the grave of my Mother and Motl.

Stas had a car, so that even though we had to go in the Inturist car with the guide, Stas offered to drive in front of us with Lolek and Lilka to guide us to all those places. We took many pictures with all the Paszkowskis, especially Felicja. The clock was ticking, two hours had already passed. When I tried to persuade Regina that I'll be glad to pay the Inturist and her any amount to be able to stay longer, she said that was impossible, our car and driver were reserved on another job at six o'clock.







So we had to run after embracing Felicja. We drove to Manka Liszykowski. She did not expect us so she did not recognize me, but when I told her that I was Vovka Gdud she cried and embraced me - but she was also mad:

"How come didn't you ever contact us during all those years?" Not a word, not even a postcard! I apologized "Dearest Manichka, I did not know where you were, I didn't even know if you were alive." Felicja did not give her my address and did not tell me about her. Apparently she does not like her. Lolek thinks that perhaps it is because of resentment: they are of the same age, Felicja is debilitated, a little confused and Manka is full of vim and vigor. Manka's son looks just like his father, Konstanty Liszykowski, but unfortunately he looks very sick. I gave Manka some gifts and money, we took pictures.

Next we ran to Vincent Liszykowski. He did not recognize me either but was glad to see me - it was hard to understand his thick Bielorussian dialect.

Next we went across the street to the old Paszkowski house which Felicja had given to Stas - it looks very nice now. We went up to the attic in which my father and I used to hide - when we would come over at night sometimes we had to stay over for the day because the nights were not long enough for us to make it back while it was still dark.

The space between the attic ceiling and the roof was very shallow and it required great strength to pull oneself up and squeeze into this hiding-place which we would use in case of alarm. Pearl couldn't stop wondering how we ever managed to climb up there. My answer was:

"It's simple if your life depends on it!" Lolek assembled a little "museum" there: old photos, certificates, a variety of old tools and







utensils we had used.

Next we drove to the village of Lipolata where the factory and our house used to be - not a trace, just a beautiful meadow. Lolek wanted to take me to the big rock we used to play on - the Goat Rock but there was no time.

Next was the Gasperowicz house. Vince, a widower appearing older than his age, still lives in the same house with his children and grandchildren, he uses the same barn in which I had been locked in by the Lithuanian.

Vince said: "Quite a dramatic happening took place here some 45 years ago." The field over which I ran while being shot at seemed much shorter to me now.

Vince said "You are right, the forest has grown in." He remembers the event perfectly, even my throwing off the sheepskin jacket to run faster, but he counted four shots, not the seven as I had thought, and it is likely that he is correct. I took pictures with him and his grandchildren.

Next we hurried to find Genia Ilewicz, now married to a Gasperowicz. Genia was in the field in her workclothes, cutting hay. When I wanted to take a picture with her, she would not let me, (even though I begged her, I was in a big hurry), until she quickly put on a pretty dress.

It was raining and getting dark when we came to the spot between the two forests where my Mother and Brother were killed and buried. The place was marked by an inconspicuous sign which gave the wrong year for the massacre and did not mention that the victims were Jews. Lilka brought lovely flowers which we placed there.







When we came back from Niemenczyn I was euphoric. The press was waiting for me - an interviewer and a photographer. They had heard about me from the Inturist and wanted to see that persistent "Crazy American" who had made so much commotion and hear what he had to say. Our friend Irena sent us to West Covina the newspaper with my picture on the front page and with the interview well and warmly described at length - see reprint and translation overleaf.

We had made arrangements to meet Lolek, Danusia and Stas next day in Wilno at our friend Irena's apartment. I took them to the Berezka dollar store where I bought clothes for Felicja, a jacket and a set of tires for Stas. Lolek would not let me buy anything for him - he said everything was exorbitant - he could get better quality things for less money in Poland with the dollars I send him.

We spent the next day with Irena, we visited the house on Bakshty and the place where I was grabbed by the German jeep. We went to the ghetto, now a slum like it was before the war and entered the house on Strashuna 1 where Pearl and her family had been confined, then drove to the buildings on Subocz which were used as the HKP concentration camp into which they were transferred. Pearl showed me the spot where she found the hiding place "maline" which saved all their lives. I finally could picture what she was talking about.

We looked at the panorama of the city from the Castle Hill. In the Visitor's Book I wrote in Polish and English an expression of my gratitude and a tribute to those citizens of my native city who had stretched out a helping hand to me in my time of need.







# НА ПОКЛОН ЗА 10.000 КИЛОМЕТРОВ

(НЕЗАБЫВАЕМАЯ ВСТРЕЧА 43 ГОДА СПУСТЯ)



Это была волнующая, теплая и очень искренняя встреча. Мужчины пытались скрыть нахлынувшие чувства, неумело прятали в рукавах носовые платки, зато женщины дали волю слезам.

— Вовка!  
— Винценты!  
— Вовка, родной, живой!.. И пошла воспоминания. Периодом из них снова предстали картины того страшного 1941-го, первые месяцы фашистской оккупации, первые жертвы, безмерные страдания, тревожные дни, горе, отчаяние, бескорыстная мощь и предательство.

— Ты почти не изменился, Вовка, ты такой же внимательный, добрый, свой...

...Уильям Гуа — терапевт из

небольшого города Вест Ковина, что в штате Калифорния, — не был в Вильнюсе 43 года. В городе детства его привело прошлое, страстное желание снова увидеть людей, которые в те грозные годы сохранили ему жизнь.

— Я родилась в Вильнюсе 63 года тому назад, жил в доме, где сейчас разместились ваш Союз архитекторов, — вспоминает Уильям Гуа. — Отец был равнином, но найти приличный приход оказалось делом нелегким. Равнинов было куда больше, чем в них нуждались. В Немечине отцу предложили принять небольшой скипидарный заводик. Делать было нечего, и он согласился. Тяжело доставался кусок хлеба. Отец, к счастью, не был ортодоксом, прекрасно сживался с людьми другой веры. Его уважали и любили. Любовь эта распространялась на всю нашу семью.

Эвакуироваться семья Гуадов (так их тогда называли) не успела. В пути им встретились немцы, пришлось тайком добираться в Немечине. Во время одной из облав на глазах у Вовки убили его лучшего друга, а его доставили в Панеряй. Всех согнанных сюда выстроили перед огромной ямой и начали стрелять в невинных лю-

дей. Юноша машинально упал, а на него один за другим падали убитые. Он потерял сознание. Но вскоре пришел в себя и выкарабкался из этого ада.

— Когда стемнело, — вспоминает У. Гуа, — я побежал. Но вдруг передо мной возникла колючая проволока. Конеч! Я начал руками разгребать песок, с огромным трудом протиснулся через узкий лаз и побежал. Но над моей головой пронеслись автоматные очереди. В эту минуту бог был милостив, я добежал до леса. Куда дальше? Перед юношей была одна дорога — в Немечине.

— Шел сентябрь 1941 года. Однажды ночью к нам постучали в окно. «Уходите, ради бога, — торопила нас соседка Фелиция Пашковска. — В Липолах роют рвы, это не к добру». Мы с отцом быстро оделись и пошли в лес. Утром нам повстречался Стипонас Нейра, вроде работавший и друживший с отцом. Я безмерно обрадовался. Но почему он срубился? «Иди, иди, Вовка, не бойся». Я первым пошел с Нейрой. Он меня сватил и запер в сарае, поставив Винценту Гастеровича сторожить сарай. «Ломай

дверь и убегай в лес, — настаивал Винценту, — иначе будет худо». Я разбежался, из всех сил прыгнул и развалился. Это заметил С. Нейра и открыл стрельбу. Я бежал по чистому полю, падал и снова бежал. Пули свистели над головой. Каким-то чудом добежал до леса. Рвы в деревне Липолаты уже были переполнены убитыми. Потог мой брат, вместе с ним на смерть пошла мама. Меня и отца спрятали добрые люди.

До 13 июля 1944 года мы с отцом прятались в Немечине, затем в Бездонисе. Но пришла долгожданная свобода. Мы словно второй раз родились...

Я всю жизнь мечтал побывать в своем городе, меня отговаривали, путали. Но я был непреклонен. От всей души благодарю работников вильнюсского «Интуриста», которые помогли мне и моей супруге побывать в Немечине, которые нам искренне сочувствовали и вместе с нами переживали.

За 10.000 километров приехал Уильям Гуа, чтобы поклониться 80-летней Фелиции Пашковской, Винценту Гастеровичу, их родственникам, всем тем, кто в трудную годину протянул руку помощи людям, попавшим в непоправимую беду.

Беседу с гостем вел  
Лазарь ГРЕЙСАС.

Фото Григория Таласа.

*Вечерние новости, 17.11*







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DIPLOMATE OF AMERICAN BOARD OF FAMILY PRACTICE

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EVENING NEWS, JULY 11, 1987 WILNO (VILNIUS)

A salute from 10,000 kilometers away

(an unforgettable meeting after 43 years)

It was an exciting, warm and very sincere meeting. The men tried to hide the engulfing feelings, inexpertly hiding the handkerchiefs in their sleeves, but the women's tears flowed freely.

-Vovka!

-Vintzenty!

-Vovka, our own , alive!

The memories rushed in. Each of them saw again the pictures of the terrible 1941, the first months of the Nazi occupation, the first victims, the limitless suffering, anxious days of desperation and sorrow, magnanimous disinterested help and also betrayal. "You are almost unchanged, Vovka, you are the same, attentive, good natured, our own."

William Good--a physician from a small town of West Covina, California had not been back to Vilnius for 43 years. The past brought him back to the city of his childhood with his passionate desire to see again the people that had saved his life during those terrible years.

I was born in Vilnius 63 years ago, we lived in the house occupied now by the Architect's Association recollects William Good. My father was a rabbi, but it was hard to make a decent living. There were many more rabbis than there was a need for. In Niemenczyn my father was offered a small terpentine manufacturing. Father accepted it since there was nothing else. It was hard to earn the daily bread. Fortunately my father was not fanatic and got along excellently with people of different religions. He was respected and loved. This love extended to our whole family.

The evacuation of the Gdud family(that was the name at that time) was not successful. They met the Germans on the way and had to get to Niemenczyn secretly. During one of the killings Vovka saw his best friend killed, then he was taken to Ponary. All those captured were lined up in front of a huge trench and they







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DIPLOMATE OF AMERICAN BOARD OF FAMILY PRACTICE

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started to shoot at innocent people. The lad fell automatically and the killed ones fell on top of him. He fainted, but regained consciousness and crawled out from that hell. After dusk, remembers William Good, I ran. But suddenly there was barbed wire before me. The end! I started to dig the ground with my hands and with huge difficulty squeezed through the narrow opening and ran. However the guards noticed me and opened automatic gun fire at me-that minute God was merciful and I reached the forest.

Where to? The lad saw only one way-to Niemenczyn.

It was September 1941. One night there was a knock in our window, "for God's sake, run, away, hurry" urged us our neighbor, Felicia Paszkowska. In Lipolaty they dig ditches-an evil omen. My father and I swiftly dressed and went to the forest. In the morning we met Stepanas Nera who supposedly worked and was friendly with my father. I was overjoyed. But why does he carry a rifle? "Go,go, Vovka, don't be afraid." I went with Nera first. He grabbed me and locked me into a barn placing Vincent Gasperowicz to guard the barn. Break the door and run to the forest - insisted Vincenty "or else the worst will befall." I ran with impetus and jumped with all my strength against the barred door and broke it. Nera noticed my breakout and started to shoot. I ran across an empty field, would fall down and run again. Bullets were whistling over my head, miraculously I reached the forest. The ditches in Lipolaty were by then overfilled with the killed. My brother perished and my Mother went with him to their death. Good people hid me and my father.

Until July 13th, 1944 we hid in Niemenczyn and near Bezdonis. But the long awaited liberty came. We were literally born anew. All my life I dreamed of visiting my town;people warned me against coming but I was firm.

I wholeheartedly thank the workers of the Vilnius "Inturist" who helped me and my wife to visit Niemenczyn and who sincerely sympathized and participated in our emotions.









Back home in West Covina.



My family in 1987.







our family in  
1995





